American Bottom Conservancy ● American Rivers ● Concerned Citizens of the Mermentau River Basin ● Cumberland Countians for Peace & Justice ● Garden Club of America ● Gulf Restoration Network ● Hoosier Environmental Council ● Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy ● Izaak Walton League of America ● Kentucky Waterways Alliance ● Land Stewardship Project ● Midwest Environmental Advocates ● Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy ● Minnesota Project ● Natural Resources Defense Council ● Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility ● Obed Watershed Association ● Ohio Environmental Council ● Prairie Rivers Network ● Save the Valley, Inc. ● Sierra Club ● Swan Conservation Trust ● Tennessee Environmental Council

February 2002

ississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient
enting its Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating,
Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico

ons thank the Bush Administration for convening the
Watershed Nutrient Task Force. We urge the newly convened
nd implementation of the recommendations contained in the
ing, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of
November 22, 2000. Implementation of the Action Plan
ortunity to address the problem of hypoxia in the Gulf of
gradation. We urge the Task Force to implement prudent,
ing voluntary and regulatory programs to reduce nutrient
ississippi River and its tributaries.

f Hypoxia

tion is the largest pollution threat to the coastal waters of the United States,
oastal rivers and bays in the country are moderately to severely degraded
n (Bricker et al. 1999; NRC 2000; Howarth et al. 2000).

The ecological problems from nutrient pollution include waters that are fully or partially depleted in oxygen (hypoxia and anoxia), and therefore unable to support animal and plant life, increased incidences and extent of harmful algal blooms, loss of seagrass beds and kelp forests, loss of nursery and spawning grounds for fish and other marine animals, and changes in the structure of food webs that can be deleterious to the production of commercial fish. These problems are more fully described in the Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico (Action Plan) and authorities it cites.

Recommendations to the M
Task Force for Implem
and Controlling

The undersigned organizatio
Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico W
Task Force to support full funding a
"Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigati
Mexico" (Action Plan) released on
represents the most significant oppo
Mexico and reverse the trend of deg
cost-effective measures under existi
loadings into the Miss

Background on Gulf

Nutrient pollu
and over half of the c
from nutrient pollutio

This pollution also is a health threat to all who drink water. Recent studies from Iowa show that even nitrate in drinking water at levels one-fourth the national standard create almost three times higher risk of bladder cancer and two times higher risk of ovarian cancer among women (Weyer et al, 2001, Epidemiology). There is widespread nitrate contamination in Midwest drinking water above these levels (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Environmental Health, September 1998).

The massive Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico, which has grown to be an area as large as the state of Massachusetts, is caused by nutrients running down the Mississippi River, a river that drains over 40% of the area of the lower 48 US states. The Dead Zone is caused by excessive nutrients – particularly nitrogen – that pollute the waters in the Gulf of Mexico downstream from the Mississippi River, triggering excess growth of algae. When the algae die and decompose,

(a) Fully fund the budget for the Action Plan, including all the items referenced below

(b) Set state numeric water quality standards for nutrients by EPA's current goal of 2004.

(c) Implement the Total Maximum Daily Load Program to set watershed nutrient limits and to target and achieve nitrogen reduction efforts, including use of cost-effective implementation measures.

(d) Expand programs to protect or restore vegetated stream buffers and wetlands on farm fields and focus restoration of wetlands in areas where filtration of farm field runoff is most needed. Provide federal funding to allow every farmer who wants to protect a wetland or stream buffer to participate. More than five million acres awaiting funding have already been identified within the Mississippi River Basin.

(e) Expand incentive programs to reduce excess applications of fertilizer through means such as testing soils to determine fertilizer needs, applying fertilizer at realistic yields, and planting winter cover crops. Provide insurance to reduce risk associated with these practices.

(f) Develop, adequately fund, and enforce a plan to both preserve and increase the stock of wetlands in nutrient-impaired watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin.

(g) End funding for federal water projects that drain significant acreage of wetlands or that further channelize the Mississippi River or its tributaries.

(h) Urge Congress and each state in the Basin to clarify protections for "isolated" waters and wetlands.

(i) Promulgate federal and state regulations that will establish effective regulatory controls to prevent air and water pollution from large animal feedlots.

(j) Provide federal assistance to and funding priority for sustainable and innovative approaches to raising livestock or poultry that prevent pollution.

(k) Provide substantially increased federal funding for non-structural protection of source and surface water, such as stream buffers, source control, easements, water conservation, water reuse, land acquisition for water quality protection, other innovative water protection projects that obviate the need for structural solutions. Do not allow the state revolving fund to be used to fund sprawl development.

(l) Ensure adequate funding for water quality monitoring and for research to determine how to most cost-effectively reduce nitrogen with wetlands, buffers, and river restoration

These actions will make immediate progress in reducing hypoxia in the Dead Zone as well as addressing surface and groundwater contamination throughout the Mississippi River Basin under existing programs. We urge you to consider these opportunities for near-term implementation of the goals of the Action Plan for reducing nitrogen loads and restoring and enhancing denitrification and nitrogen retention within the Basin.

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